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Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency

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Note by the Secretary-General

Owing to exceptional circumstances, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency was unable to deliver his annual statement on the report of the Agency to the General Assembly, as indicated in the note by the Secretary-General (A/67/152). The Secretary-General hereby transmits the prepared statement by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency introducing the report of the Agency at the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

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Statement of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session

When I addressed the General Assembly a year ago, I spoke at some length about the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan in March 2011. The aftermath of the devastating earthquake and tsunami dominated the work of IAEA for much of that year.

We are now well into the post-accident phase. The focus is on implementing the IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety which was adopted by our Member States last year.

Progress has been made in many areas.

Measures have been taken to improve protection against extreme hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis. Countries are upgrading their emergency preparedness and response capabilities. IAEA safety standards are being reviewed. Our programme of expert peer review services is being expanded. A key priority for all nuclear power plant operators has been establishing reliable back-up electricity supply in the event of a prolonged blackout.

Already, it is fair to say that nuclear power is safer than it was before the Fukushima Daiichi accident. But the process of ensuring that the right lessons are learned will continue for many years. It is essential that the Action Plan is implemented in full.

Next month, IAEA and the Government of Japan will hold a Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety in Fukushima Prefecture. At this Conference, we will present the conclusions of international expert meetings on issues such as reactor and spent fuel safety, responding to tsunamis and earthquakes, and transparency and communication.

We will also prepare a comprehensive report on the Fukushima Daiichi accident, to be finalized in 2014.

The lasting legacy of the accident will be a much more intense focus on safety. Nuclear safety remains the responsibility of individual countries. However, Governments have recognized that effective international cooperation is vitally important and that IAEA has a unique role to play.

Nuclear power remains a growth area globally, despite the Fukushima Daiichi accident. Growth is likely to be slower than we anticipated before the accident. But our latest projections show a steady rise in the number of nuclear power plants in the world in the next 20 years.

Most of the new nuclear power reactors which are planned or under construction are in Asia. Established users such as China, India, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation plan significant expansions of their nuclear power programmes.

IAEA works very closely with what we call newcomer countries — those which are building, or plan to build, their first nuclear power plants. The United Arab Emirates recently became the first country in 27 years to start building its first nuclear power plant. Countries as diverse as Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Poland and Belarus plan to follow suit.

Nuclear energy offers many benefits. It can help to improve energy security, reduce the impact of volatile fossil fuel prices, mitigate the effects of climate change and make economies more competitive. It also has important non-electric applications such as seawater desalination, district heating and heat for industrial processes.

The safe management and disposal of radioactive waste and spent fuel remain key issues. The nuclear industry has been managing interim waste disposal successfully for more than half a century. But no long-term disposal facility has so far become operational for nuclear spent fuel. This is often due to difficulties involving public acceptance.

Nevertheless, good progress has been made in a number of countries, including Finland, Sweden and France. We expect the first deep geological repositories for nuclear spent fuel to become operational after 2020.

Next June, an International Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Power in the 21st Century will take place in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation. It will provide a valuable opportunity to consider nuclear power's long-term contribution to sustainable development.

The IAEA technical cooperation programme is making important contributions to tackling fundamental global problems identified in the Millennium Development Goals and at Rio+20. These include poverty and hunger, energy shortages, cancer and climate change.

IAEA is in a unique position within the United Nations system. We are the only organization with expertise in nuclear technologies and we help our member States to gain access to those technologies for peaceful purposes.

We work closely with recipient countries and with partners such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and UNESCO.

Through several hundred IAEA projects, we are helping to increase food production in dozens of countries, often improving their export capacity in the process. Nuclear techniques related to food were the focus of a two-day Scientific Forum which we held in September.

Cancer in developing countries remains high on the Agency's agenda. I plan to strengthen our Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy and to establish a Cancer Training Centre at our laboratory complex near Vienna within the next few years. This will provide specialist training for health professionals from Member States.

Our nuclear applications laboratories near Vienna are doing pioneering work related to human and animal health, food security and safety, agriculture, and environmental monitoring. My goal is to carry out a complete modernization within a few years so that these laboratories can offer even better services to our member States.

At the Rio+20 Conference in June, we announced the establishment of an Ocean Acidification International Coordination Centre at the IAEA Environment Laboratories in Monaco. This responds to concern among Member States about climate change, including the threat of ocean acidification due to increased carbon dioxide uptake by the oceans.

In the last few years, world leaders have given considerable attention to the threat of nuclear terrorism. They have recognized the Agency's central role in strengthening nuclear security.

As I told the Secretary-General's High-level Meeting on Countering Nuclear Terrorism in September, strengthening our activities in this area will remain one of the Agency's key priorities.

Our work focuses on helping to minimize the risk of nuclear and other radioactive material falling into the hands of terrorists, or of nuclear facilities being subjected to malicious acts.

IAEA has established internationally accepted guidance that is used as a benchmark for nuclear security. We help countries to apply this guidance through expert peer review missions, specialist training and human resource development programmes.

The Agency helps countries to put laws and regulatory infrastructure in place to protect nuclear and other radioactive material. We provide guidance to States on how to implement their international obligations in this area.

IAEA has trained over 12,000 people in more than 120 countries in nuclear security in the last decade. We provided assistance at high-profile events such as the UEFA European Football Championships. Considerable amounts of highly enriched uranium have been put into more secure storage. Our Illicit Trafficking Database keeps track of thefts or other unauthorized activities involving nuclear and other radioactive materials.

Despite the enhanced global interest in nuclear security, there is still one important item of unfinished business: ratification of the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. The Amendment was agreed in 2005 but it has still not entered into force. The Amendment would expand coverage of the Convention to include the protection of nuclear material in domestic use, storage and transport, and the protection of nuclear facilities against acts of sabotage. Entry into force of the Amendment would make an important difference to global nuclear security.

In July 2013, the Agency will organize an International Conference on Nuclear Security at ministerial level in Vienna. The Conference will seek to build on the achievements of the last 10 years in our collective efforts to prevent nuclear and other radioactive material from falling into the wrong hands.

This Conference is open to all States. I urge all countries to take part at ministerial level.

Turning now to nuclear verification, I am pleased to report that the number of States with additional protocols to their safeguards agreements in force continues to rise. It now stands at 119. This is very encouraging because the additional protocol is an essential tool for the Agency to be able to provide credible assurance that there are no undeclared nuclear material and activities in a country.

The number of countries without safeguards agreements in force has fallen to 13. I ask all of them to bring such agreements into force as soon as possible.

I continue to report to the IAEA Board of Governors on safeguards implementation in three countries in particular — the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Each of these countries is failing to fully meet its obligations. Dealing with cases such as these represents one of the major challenges which the Agency must confront in the coming years.

In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Agency continues to verify that nuclear material declared by the country under its Safeguards Agreement is not being diverted from peaceful purposes.

However, the Islamic Republic of Iran is not providing the necessary cooperation to enable us to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities. Therefore, we cannot conclude that all nuclear material in the country is in peaceful activities.

Last November, I reported that the Agency had credible information indicating that the Islamic Republic of Iran had carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device. I requested the Islamic Republic of Iran to clarify these issues.

Dialogue has been intensified between IAEA and the Islamic Republic of Iran this year. However, no concrete results have been achieved so far.

In September, the Board of Governors adopted a resolution urging the Islamic Republic of Iran to immediately conclude, and implement, an agreement with IAEA on a structured approach for resolving outstanding issues related to possible military dimensions to its nuclear programme.

The Agency is firmly committed to intensifying dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran. We will continue negotiations on a structured approach. I hope we can reach agreement without further delay.

I remain seriously concerned about the nuclear programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Its statements about uranium enrichment activities and the construction of a light water reactor are deeply troubling.

The Agency has not been able to implement any verification measures in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since April 2009. I call upon the country to fully comply with its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions, and with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and to cooperate promptly and fully with the Agency.

In the case of the Syrian Arab Republic, you will recall that, in May 2011, I reported that it was very likely that a building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site was a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the Agency. I reiterate my request to the Syrian Arab Republic to hold further discussions with the Agency to address all outstanding questions related to Dair Alzour and other locations.

In November 2011, we were finally able to host an IAEA Forum on Experience of Possible Relevance to the Creation of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East. The fact that it took 11 years from the IAEA General Conference decision to hold such a meeting reflects the complex nature of the issue.

The Forum provided an opportunity for member States to engage in a constructive exchange of views. However, there remain fundamental differences of views among countries of the region on this important issue and it has not been possible to make further progress. I will continue my consultations.

As requested by the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, we have submitted background documentation for the 2012 Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.

Finally, I am pleased to report that the Agency's financial statements for 2011 were the first which comply with International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). The External Auditor released an unqualified opinion on the financial statements. The successful introduction of IPSAS was a milestone in our management reform efforts.

As we prepare the programme and budget for 2014-2015, technical cooperation and nuclear safety and security remain the Agency's top priorities. Looking beyond the next budget cycle, I count on our 155 member States to ensure that we have sufficient resources to fulfil the many important tasks which they have entrusted to us.